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ABSTRACT

An experiment conducted in 1975 tested the effects of two policy changes in five Oklahoma County Library System bookmobiles: (1) conversion to predominantly paperback collections; and (2) relaxation of overdue policies. There were two indicators of success: (1) the bookmobiles experienced a 26% increase in circulation during the year; and (2) the number of materials circulated and not returned proved cost-effective in terms of the value of paperback materials lost in circulation versus the predictable loss rate of hardbound materials. Data are summarized and policy implications discussed. (EMH)

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BOOKMOBILES AND PAPERBACKS

An Extended Study of the Use of Paperbacks and Elimination of Overdue Fines at the Oklahoma County Libraries System

By

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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As reported in "Bookmobiles and Paperbacks: An Experimental Study at the Oklahoma County Libraries System with Bookmobiles Using Paperbound Book Collections and Eliminating Overdue Fines and Notices",[1] November, 1975, the Oklahoma County Libraries System studied the acceptability of the paperback book format to bookmobile users, user acceptability of a topical browsing arrangement of bookmobile book collections, and cost-effectiveness of a circulation policy and procedure that eliminated all overdue fines and notices.

This experiment was conducted for a six month period with one of the five library system bookmobiles in 1974. In this study it was found that the paperback format and browsing arrangement of books was acceptable to bookmobile users. It was also found that the rate of books unreturned from circulation under the policy of no overdue fines or notices was cost effective in comparing the dollar cost of paperback books lost in the experiment to the dollar cost of hardbound books lost in circulation for the rest of the library system. This cost-effectiveness was true even though the percentage rate of books unreturned from circulation in the experiment rose above the average percentage rate for the library system.

[1] Accepted for inclusion in Resources in Education data base of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources under document number ED 115 267 in 1976.

1975 Experiment:

As a result of the successful experimental study with one bookmobile the Oklahoma County Libraries System converted it's five bookmobiles to paperback collections and the basic policies and procedures developed during the study. January, 1975 marked the beginning of these operations.

In order to test the effects of the changes on all of the bookmobiles during 1975 with as few intervening variables as possible the same book budget of the previous year was maintained. We were able to maintain the 1974 schedules of the bookmobiles during 1975 and also the same level of basic publicity. Fortunately four of the five bookmobiles were operated by the same staff members during the entire year. Each of the four clerks had had some bookmobile experiences during 1974.

The book collections of the bookmobiles were placed in the browsing categories arrangement developed in 1974 with one change; the "biology" category was eliminated and a "biography" category was created. On January 2, 1975 the collections had been converted to approximately 60% paperbacks and 40% hardbounds. During the year paperbacks were continually added to the collection not only to supplant hardbounds but to add new titles as well; by the end of the year the collections consisted of approximately 90% paperback books.

The hand charging circulation policy and procedure developed in 1974 was installed with some needed changes. These changes were:

1. The combination borrower registration and borrowing record card was changed to effect a smaller, more manageable size and format.

2. An overdue book notice policy and procedure was instigated that provided the ability for bookmobile staff to send notices to borrowers who developed an "excessive" record of overdue materials. Excessive was not defined but left to individual situations and staff discretion.

Provision of ability of borrowers to return books borrowed at bookmobiles to any other library system facilities, a standard three week loan period

on all bookmobile materials, and the policy of not charging any overdue fines on books borrowed from bookmobiles were continued. Citizens borrowing materials from any other library system facility continued to be able to return such materials to bookmobiles. Library users also were given the continued ability to request that materials from any library system facility be sent to the bookmobiles for loan from the bookmobile.

Success indicators for the 1975 bookmobile experience were:

1. Each bookmobile, and the bookmobiles collectively, would experience at least an 8 percent increase in circulation over 1974.

2. The number of materials circulated and not returned would be cost-effective in terms of the value of paperback materials lost in circulation versus the predictable loss rate of hardbound materials of the rest of the library system and the resulting costs.

The actual circulation records of the bookmobiles with their paperbacks would be measured for the number of books unreturned six months or more after their loan date at an average acquisition cost of 87 cents per book. The rate for the rest of the library system was to be computed on an average of 1.45 percent of hardbound books unreturned six months or more after the loan date at an average acquisition cost of $4.56 per volume.

It was decided not to evaluate the browsing category arrangement of the bookmobiles due to the earlier success of the change but rather to record the usage of various categories on each bookmobile and use the 1975 experience for further individual collection adjustments on each bookmobile.

Also planned was examination of the durability of paperbacks in actual circulation usage on the bookmobiles. No comparative measures with the rest of the library system or other standards were planned. This survey was to be achieved through analysis of paperbacks discarded between May 18 and August 31, 1976 due to excessive wear.

Late in 1975 it was decided, based on similar analysis applied to the bookmobiles originally in late 1973, to convert Wright branch library to a

paperback collection with the browsing arrangement and circulation policies and procedures of the bookmobiles. Wright branch had been, for years, the branch library producing the smallest circulation of all branch libraries. The building is the smallest of our library buildings. It was underfunded for acquisition of new materials to replace those worn out or lost in circulation. Also it was highly questionable that it would be cost effective to include Wright in the new circulation system.

In converting to a paperback operation at Wright the shelving was rearranged, and some removed, to better accomodate the browsing arrangement of the books. Approximately 2,000 hardbound books were initially removed from the collection and replaced by 1700 paperbacks. By the time the paperback operation began on January 2, 1976 the collection consisted of some forty percent paperbacks and sixty percent hardbounds.

From January through September the normal program of acquisition was continued, adding new and replacement titles in paperback as available and necessary. The same experienced staff member who operated Wright through 1975 continued through 1976. No special publicity regarding the changes made at the branch was made.

Evaluation of Wright's experiences for the first six months of paperback operation were planned as essentially the same as that for bookmobiles for their 1975 experiences.

Results:

Circulation increases of the individual bookmobiles and the bookmobiles a group are reflected in Table I. These results reflect that the bookmobiles exceeded the anticipated results of an 8 percent increase significantly. Data included here is for total circulation experiences of the bookmobiles January 2, 1975 through December 31, 1975 and for the same period during 1974.

Actual paperbacks lost in the 1975 circulation by the bookmobiles individually and as a group are shown in Table 2. These are based on analysis of the circulation records of the bookmobiles for 1975 as to books loaned during the 12 months and not returned 6 months or more after the due date. The analysis was made in August, 1976.

Table I

Analysis of 1975 Circulation
Increases (+) or Decreases (-) Over 1974

	# Adult Materials Circulated	% Increase or Decrease	# Juvenile Materials Circulated	% Increase or Decrease	Total # Materials Circulated	% Increase or Decrease	# Days Open 1975	# Books Gained In Circulation Per Days Open
Bookmobile #41	11,301	+25	16,174	+20	27,475	+22	208	32
Bookmobile #42	11,515	+20	10,245	+43	21,760	+30	208	14
Bookmobile #43	8,888	+54	4,386	+49	13,274	+52	104	80
Bookmboile #44	7,929	+88	4,034	-16	11,963	+33	104	28
Bookmobile #45	22,469	+21	9,111	+ 9	31,580	+17	260	25
Total all Bookmobiles	62,102	+31	43,950	+20	106,052	+26	884	25

Table II

Bookmobile Books Unreturned From Circulation
By August, 1976; Borrowed January 1975
to January, 1976

	# Adult Books Unreturned	% of Adult Circulation	# Juvenile Books Unreturned	% of Juvenile Circulation	Total Books Unreturned	% of Total Circulation
Bookmobile # 41	56	.005	48	.003	104	.004
Bookmobile # 42	none	—	none	—	none	—
Bookmobile # 43	none	—	none	—	none	—
Bookmobile # 44	420	.05	148	.04	568	.047
Bookmobile # 45	30	.001	20	.002	50	.002
Totals for Bookmobiles	506	.008	216	.005	722	.007
Totals for Rest of Library System (Adult & Juvenile combined)						.0145

Cost-effectiveness of the 1975 bookmobile experience with books lost in circulation is shown in Table III, the books lost those shown in Table II. The average costs for hardbounds and paperbacks are actual acquisition costs determined from records of the library system. The 1.45 percent loss rate experience of the library system for the central and branch libraries. Both the bookmobile and library system rates are based on books being lost 6 months or more after the due date of the loan.

Table III

Dollar Cost-Effectiveness of Bookmobile Paperback Operation In 1975

	A % Books Circulated Lost In Circulation 1975	B Average $ Cost of Books Lost Lost[1]	C Average $ Loss Per 100 Books Circulated
Bookmobiles	.007	$ .87	$ .61
Rest of Library System	1.45	4.56	6.61

(1) Average cost for bookmobile is that of paperbacks, that of Library System for hardbound books.

Relationships of the various bookmobile paperback collection browsing categories to the circulation they produced in 1975 are shown in Table IV. The variances noted among the bookmobiles were anticipated and are to be used for further refining of these collections to match specific borrower interests and demands.

Table IV

Bookmobile Circulation Analysis
Based on Books Returned
May 18 - August 31, 1976

Categories	Percentage of Total Number Books Returned					
Adult	Bkmb 41	Bkmb 42	Bkmb 43	Bkmb 44	Bkmb 45	Total Bookmobiles
Philosophy & Psychology	00.3	00.4	00.2	00.6	00.6	00.5
Religion	00.8	00.3	00.8	00.6	00.9	00.7
Social Science/ Folklore	00.1	00.6	00.4	00.7	01.5	00.8
Science	01.0	01.3	00.8	01.8	01.0	01.2
Medicine	00.5	00.4	00.1	00.9	00.4	00.5
Homes/Home Economics	01.1	00.5	00.5	01.2	01.7	01.1
Business	00.0*	00.2	00.0*	00.1	00.2	00.1
Arts/Crafts	00.0*	00.2	00.0*	02.0	00.5	00.5
Music/Drama	00.2	00.2	00.1	00.5	00.6	00.3
Games/Sports	00.7	00.7	00.4	00.7	00.7	00.6
Literature	00.2	00.6	00.3	00.3	00.5	00.4
History	00.4	01.1	00.2	01.4	01.1	00.7
Biography	01.0	00.7	01.2	00.0*	01.6	01.0
Fiction (Gen.)	37.2	32.0	34.0	28.6	43.2	36.6
Fiction (Mys.)	04.5	05.8	03.8	04.8	05.5	05.1
Fiction (Wes.)	01.7	03.4	04.5	02.1	02.3	02.8
Fiction (Sci-Fic.)	01.4	02.3	05.2	03.8	00.9	02.4
Juvenile						
"Easy" Books	27.2	16.7	18.6	29.0	18.2	20.6
Readers	04.9	19.2	07.2	08.0	06.5	09.7
Fiction	17.7	13.4	21.5	12.9	12.0	14.7

* Represents 1 or less book.

The intended measurement of durability of paperbacks in actual circulation usage was scheduled as an analysis of books discarded due to poor condition by the bookmobiles between May 18 and August 31, 1976. This measure necessarily must be regarded as invalid in that the discarding patterns of the bookmobiles during the sampling period was highly inconsistent and erratic. However, there was sufficient discarding activity by three of the bookmobiles during the period to an extent that their experience may indicate the trend of the durability of the paperbacks in that over fifty percent of the books discarded had been circulated five or more times. Analysis of the books discarded by the three bookmobiles is shown in Table V.

Table V

Analysis of Paperbacks Discarded
By Bookmobiles May 18-August 31, 1976

	Number of Times Circulated Prior to Discarding							
	1 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 39	Total
# Books Discarded	135	100	104	36	28	7	5	415
% of Total Books	33%	24%	25%	9%	7%	1.5%	.05%	100%

During the period January 2 - June 30, 1976 Wright branch library experienced an 18 percent increase in circulation over the same period in 1975. Their experience with books lost in circulation for the months of January, February and March of 1975, as of 6 months after the return due dates for these months, is a total of 17 books unreturned of a total of 2492 books circulated. This is a non-return rate of .007 percent of circulation.

The three months loss experience of Wright equals a dollar of 61 cents per one hundred books circulated, assuming books lost as paperbacks acquired at a cost of 87 cents each. This can be related to the loss and cost-effectiveness experiences of the bookmobiles during 1975 as shown in Tables II and III.

Observations by staff members during these months indicated that there was some resistance by the borrowers at Wright to the paperback operation initially. These areas of resistance seemed to fall in three general categories:

1) a general preference for hardbound books, 2) a general dislike of change in general and 3) a preference for the paperbacks to all be located in one small collection shelved in one place for easy browsing by those who primarily read paperbacks.

These observations also indicate that by the end of the first six months most user resistance had dissappeared.

Early in 1975 the library system began work leading to new management and budgeting programs grounded in principles of program budgeting. As a part of this work the practical service areas of the bookmobiles were delineated and the populations therein described.

From this information and the circulation records of the bookmobiles it was possible to establish a beginning analysis of the effectiveness of the bookmobiles in reaching the residents within their service areas, as shown in Table VI. No attempt has been made at this time to draw any conclusions from this information but rather to establish a beginning from which to plan later and comparative study of various measures of such effectiveness.

Table VI

Analysis of Borrowers Registered
By Bookmobiles
January 2, 1976 - July 1, 1976

Bookmobiles:	Total number of Borrowers Registered	Total population in service area	% of audience population registered	Average number borrowers registered per hours open
#41	938	10,855	09	.38
#42	486	5,536	09	.39
#43	208	1,931	11	.17
#44	878	4,504	19	.70
#45	1,735	6,381	27	.56
Total Bookmobiles	4,245	29,297	15	.40 2.5

Conclusions:

Bookmobiles;

There were four extremely low rates of books unreturned from circulation. Each of the four dealt with highly diverse populations in terms of income, educational level, urban or rural residency and ethnic backgrounds.

The two constants among the four bookmobiles with low rates of unreturned books were that overdue book notices were used and that these were also the same bookmobiles that retained experienced staff members during the entire year. The primary conclusion from the experience is that reminding borrowers of books they have not returned and of library procedures, whether through staff verbal contact of through notices, is the vital element revealed in maintaining a low rate of books unreturned from circulation. This is especially confirmed in the case of the two bookmobiles having no books unreturned, since these two units had experienced staff members who not only reminded bookmobile users verbally but also sent written notices concerning unreturned books.

The one bookmobile with a high rate of books unreturned from circulation was the only one that experienced few overdue book notices being sent its patrons during 1975 and was also the only bookmobile to be operated during the year by several, inexperienced staff members. Based on the favorable book return rate of the bookmobiles as compared to that of the rest of the library system the tentative conclusion can be drawn that experienced, interested personnel and overdue book notices are the primary tools in maintaining a low book loss in circulation, and that perhaps overdue fines are a less important control.

Circulation increases experienced in 1975 for all bookmobiles verify the acceptance by the bookmobile users of the paperbacks, browsing arrangement of books, and new procedures. The pattern of circulation increases does not suggest any significant differences in general acceptance of the paperback bookmobiles among audiences varying by educational levels, urban or rural residency, or income levels.

The smaller increase in circulation by bookmobile number 42 as compared to the rest of the units is attributable to the fact that this was the experimental bookmobile in 1974 and that there was a tapering-off effect of the newness of the service among their patrons. The dramatic increase on bookmobile number 43 likely can be attributed to its community identification and its position of prime source of library service for that community.

Bookmobile 43 has been permantly parked in a rural community for several years in the center of the community at a high traffic location. It is approximately nine miles to the next nearest library service point from this bookmobile.

Cost-Effectiveness of the paperbacks in terms of dollar cost lost in circulation proved to be significant in 1975, in fact showing a dramatic improvement over the 1974 study experience. The addition of overdue material notices to the procedures of the bookmobiles must be regarded as the prime factor in this change coupled with the retention of experienced bookmobile personnel during the year.

It should be noted that this particular facet of cost-effectiveness was of major concern both in 1974 and 1975 due to the experimental nature of the policy of no overdue fines or notices. The cost-effectiveness of prices of paperbacks over hardbounds and of not cataloging paperbacks required no study.

The addition of overdue notices in 1975 and the dramatic improvement in the return of books over the 1974 experience leaves serious doubt regarding effectiveness of overdue fines as an instrument to encourage borrowed materials being returned by the bookmobile users.

One other facet of cost-effectiveness of the paperbacks themselves not assessed in 1974 was that of durability in the user loan process. Though the attempted study of this factor in 1975 must be regarded as an invalid sample for measurement it can tentatively be regarded as indicative of the general trend of durability. It would appear that 50 percent or more of the paperbacks successfully withstand the wear of five or more circulations before their condition warrants discarding them.

We hope to conduct further investigation to obtain valid data concerning this aspect of cost-effectiveness of paperbacks, both in absolute terms for paperbacks themselves as well as comparing them with hardbound books.

Wright Branch: The circulation increase experienced at Wright indicates the effectiveness of the new arrangement as well as the acceptance of paperback format in serving the borrowers. The original user compalints have almost disappeared at this time primarily due to the users becoming familiar with the arrangement and to gradually be as able to locate desired reading now as they had been previously with the old arrangement.

Those users who criticized the loss of the hardbound books appear to have been satisfied by using the paperbacks to some extent and encouraged to obtain desired hardbound titles through other facilities of the library system. Staff attention to borrower service and satisfaction, including advising and assisting borrowers in various services available, has been a major factor in these users being satisfied with the new arrangement.

The low rate of books lost in circulation experienced thus far at Wright is especially encouraging. It affords us a cost-effective circulation policy and procedure that simultaneously, through its simplicity, affords a more direct service approach between library and library users.

During 1975 we relied primarily on our local news distributor for obtaining most adult paperback books and some of the juvenile titles for the bookmobiles coupled with some direct orders for juvenile books. As the experience progressed and circulation increased it became obvious that these sources were not adequate to maintain an adequate or timely acquisitions program for the bookmobiles. We found that the large news company, though interested in serving our needs, was not able to adjust its usual ordering and handling procedures to provide the necessary services.

Early in 1976 we began monitoring the adequacy of our acquisitions program for paperbacks for bookmobiles as well as the rest of the library system. As a result of the analysis a new acquisitions program had already partially begun, and on October 1, 1976 the new program will be in effect.

Major thrust of the acquisition program will be to attempt to obtain the majority of the needed paperbacks through paperback jobbers. It is hoped that recently begun Baker and Taylor service will provide most needs in adult mass market titles and that the services of Bookmen, Inc. will be adequate for most of the needed mass market juvenile books. Regular monthly orders will be directed to these.

In addition we will be using the services of Ray Surgine of Colorado for the out of the ordinary adult titles and will ocassionally use direct orders to such publishers as Scholastic for juvenile materials. As an added source for meeting the heavy demands of the bookmobiles and Wright branch library we will continue to make infrequent trips to the local news company to acquire large numbers of new or replacement titles in popular adult categories such as mysteries and general fiction.

As we work within this new program its success and problems will be monitored and necessary adjustments made. As a part of this monitoring we also plan to maintain awareness of new paperback services that develop.

Paperback books have increasingly become an important part of the book collection in the entire library system as well as the bookmobiles and Wright library. Since April, 1975 the number of paperback books owned by library system facilities has steadily increased. We are steadily adding paperback books as well as convenient and attractive shelving units for them. The branches and central library are primarily utilizing the attractive free-standing paperback shelving units currently available from the Gaylord Company and we are adding more of these units each year.

Though the paperbacks do not numerically constitute a major part of any of our book collections other than those of the bookmobiles and Wright Branch, they play a major role in meeting library user demands for reading materials to be borrowed. An individual example of this is the Belle Isle branch library, the most heavily used of any of our facilities, including our central library. Belle Isle, as of June 30, 1976, had a total inventory of 74037 print and non-print items in its collection.

Of this total 7,781 (or 10%) were paperback books. For the period of

July 1, 1975 thru June 30, 1976 Belle Isle experienced a total circulation of 256,066. Of this total, paperbacks accounted for 37,918 (or 15% of the circulation). For the library system as a whole (excluding bookmobiles and Wright branch) during the 1975-76 fiscal year, paperback books represented 9% of the total inventory of print and non-print materials. They accounted for 18% of the library system circulation during the same period.

For the entire library system the fact that our paperback books cost an average of 19% of the acquisition costs of hardbound book acquisitions, plus the fact that they produce circulation 5% or more above their percentage share of the total materials collection, indicates a high level of <u>total</u> as well as <u>cost</u> effectiveness of paperback books.